

TRIBULATIONS OF AMERICAN WOMEN ABROAD

IN HER ONLY CONTRIBUTION TO THE PRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

ANSWERS THE VITAL QUESTION:

IS THE INFLUENCE OF CONTINENTAL LIFE
UPON THE AMERICAN GIRL BENEFICIAL?

Arthur Page



A BRILLIANT CRITIQUE ON
THE SOCIAL CONDITIONS
OF TWO CONTINENTS

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IS the influence of Continental life upon the American girl beneficial?

The question is difficult to answer, as so much depends upon the temperament and disposition of the individual.

In any case, the expression of any opinion upon a social matter is so liable to offend in one quarter or another that in giving one's ideas, however well formed and judicious they may be, one feels danger of becoming entangled in a net from which it may be hard to escape.

At the outset a direct contradiction presents itself, as the influence of Continental life upon the American girl has at one and the same time a broadening as well as a narrowing influence.

The beneficial side is to be found in the fact that travel is the greatest of all educators.

On her first entrance into European society the average American girl is pained as well as surprised to find that her education has been sadly neglected. For the first time in her young life she realizes that the groundwork of English, the smattering of French, and perhaps German, and the slight knowledge of music and free-hand drawing which she has acquired from a governess do not fit her for her surroundings.

The American girl who hopes to shine in Continental society must be versatile. She must be able to converse in all countries with all sorts and conditions of men with equal facility.

She must be able to talk with the politician on politics, the artist on art, the diplomatist on diplomacy, the bookworm on current literature, the musician on music. To accomplish this, she must be a linguist.

How often is a society woman called upon both as hostess and as guest to speak French, German, and Italian!

If she has a knowledge of these languages, which, combined with English, are sufficient to carry one without inconvenience throughout the world, she may in time, granting she possesses that indefinable something which is termed magnetism, and which is so essential to social success, become an ornament, and, indeed, an acquisition to any aristocracy which, with centuries of culture and breeding behind it, gladly welcomes at all times the truest and most lasting of all aristocracies—the aristocracy of brains.

How obvious it is, therefore, that a hostess unable to speak to, not to say entertain, her guests must necessarily be a hopeless failure.

This, unfortunately, is the adverse condition under which the latter-day American girl enters into a sphere of life for which she is at least temporarily unfitted.

It is a fortunate thing, however, that the dominant spirit of the true American asserts itself, and in most cases the American girl on the Continent realizes that she is handicapped in the social



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race, and, like a good horse, puts forth all her energies to gain the ground which was lost through no fault of her own, and if she does not win out she usually gains a recognized place in the world she has set out to conquer.

Certainly she possesses to an extraordinary degree that characteristic—or is it a gift?—of adapting herself to her surroundings. If at all times the American girl does not behave as though she belonged to the best society, she can usually be trusted to behave as though the best society belonged to her.

And so it is that today American women figure prominently at every court in Europe.

This is the beneficial influence of Continental life upon the American woman.

Before looking at the reverse side of the picture, it is as well to compare the system of latter-day education of the children who in the natural course of events will later enter into the ranks of Continental society, with the system in vogue twenty-five years ago.

Then, private schools were the medium by which children gained a solid groundwork on which to build a superstructure. For every separate subject a different tutor was available, a man or woman thoroughly competent to teach one particular branch of learning. In that way education which was education in the most liberal sense of the word was accomplished.

Today a governess is called into requisition to instill into the youthful mind every subject in the curriculum. When one takes into consideration that the accomplishments of the average governess are necessarily very limited, the absurdity of this system of educating a child for the great outside world is apparent.

A review of the disadvantages of Continental society life for the American girl entails some harsh criticism, but then when criticism is required it is best to come from a friendly source.

There can be no question that in most of the American marriages into Continental aristocracies, the bride not only brings her husband a fortune, but also a re-enforcement of brains, which, in truth, he often needs as much or more than he does the money.

It is, however, a deplorable fact that, while at home American women are among the most patriotic in the world, abroad they seem to glory in being what they are pleased to term "cosmopolitan." In most cases their interest in their native land is obviously hypocritical. This attitude is especially applicable to the single American girl, who does not take long to discover that in society persons who are not hypocrites are never believed sincere.

It is to be equally deplored that in intermarrying with foreigners the American girl in most cases entirely forgets or ignores

her birthplace, and becomes more foreign than the foreigners themselves.

There is only one explanation to this pathetic state of affairs. In England there is a class of person known and described as a "snob."

It has been claimed that the English language is not expressive. May be this is so, but in the word "snob" a volume of meaning is compressed into four letters.

A snob is a person who, though made according to the Divine idea, would have been a great deal more satisfied had he been made according to his own. A snob is a person who, if of lowly origin, is ashamed of the mother who bore him. A snob is a person who, though entirely devoid of intellect, objects on prin-



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ple to other people using their brains to further the interests of trade and commerce.

A tradesman is not in his "class," and it is fortunate for the tradesman that he is not.

The condition of being a snob is just as much a disease as measles. The contagion is usually contracted from association with the class without the pale of society proper, and the complaint too often increases in virulence as the patient becomes more self-important with small social triumphs.

And this is what the American girl should be warned against. She is liable to contract it.

The fact of marrying an English husband or living abroad does not entitle the American girl to stigmatize the democratic tendencies of her native land as vulgar, neither does it improve her to ape English customs and cultivate a pronounced English accent.

It is not absolutely necessary to decry everything American and boast of the fact that by marrying an Englishman of title she in consequence becomes an Englishwoman.

Again the American girl should be warned. She is likely to need the warning.

After all, there is no need for the American girl to become anything else but American. She has every reason to be proud of her great country, and the fact of her nationality is no hindrance to her social progress in any court of Europe, so long as she has the qualifications necessary for her position. It is nevertheless true that in the majority of cases where the American girl has married a foreigner, she has altogether sunk her country, her opinions, her very identity, into those of her husband.

The morals of the American society girl are no better and no worse than those of the girls on the Continent.

True, the American girl is allowed greater freedom of action than her European sister, and to the inexperienced this may seem indicative of a certain disregard of the proprieties.

But here again it is a question of the individual.

Society as a whole is like royalty as an individual, inasmuch as its actions are at all times public property.

It is obvious that with a thousand eyes constantly on the alert, a well-known society man or woman can do no wrong without taking the world and his wife into his confidence.

And then some literary Phoenix—usually a woman, by the way—rising from the ashes of consumed ambition, fills the columns of what are known as society journals, from the fact that they flinch society scandal from society's servants, with a sweeping denunciation of the immorality of the society woman, ignoring the fact that her sisters, in what in England is so aptly described as the "middle classes," are oftentimes not as immaculate as they should be, and, moreover, totally forgetting that there is at least one sin worse than immorality, and that is—scandal.

Comparing American and English husbands, there can be no question that the American has no equal in the world, both as husband and as father.

It may be said that American wives are too much petted. This is unquestionably so, but they are little the worse for it.

As a rule the English husband can be compared to an egg—he is so full of himself that he cannot hold anything else.

The only thing that interests him in his wife is her interest in another man. She has to shoulder her portion of the burden, and in this solitary instance the English husband is generous. He gives her a good deal more than her portion. As a colossal monument to "self," the Englishman stands as a pyramid in a desert.

It has been said, however, that there are some exceptions. After all, the world is sometimes charitable.

To those who remember America and Americans in the days gone by, when all women were queens of their own kingdoms and all men their courtiers, it must come as a shock to find that reverence and respect, to say nothing of courtesy to the gentler sex,

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are now qualities practically unknown. But the same state of affairs exists in England.

Is it that woman's struggle for "social equality" has brought about this state of affairs?

If so, it is a negative compliment for any woman to be considered man's equal.

One word more regarding the subject at issue. American women should remember that success was never a question of nationality alone. It rests with the individual.

Surely it is preferable to be a successful nonentity than an unsuccessful society woman, for, after all, the former has some uses in life, the latter none.

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